



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW

NO. DCLXXXIX

APRIL, 1913

CHRIST AND BERGSON

BY GEORGE WILLIAM DOUGLAS, D.D.,
CANON OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE

THROUGHOUT our modern world there is coming to the fore a consciousness of the value of each person's life. When our Saviour presented Himself to the world, it was as One in Whom this sense was keen: He felt it in Himself; and He inspired His disciples to feel it. But in the practice of the majority it was a new idea. Small value was put by most men on the life of individuals, or even of whole tribes, if only the few, who were for the moment strong, could grip the weaker and force them to the wall; and slavery was in the background almost everywhere.

Into the maelstrom of such brutality came Jesus Christ. He set a high value on His own life, and on the lives of all; and in His character He manifested what would follow from His conception of human life—what it would produce in mankind. His view commended itself steadily. But, just because the process was vital, it has taken a long time. After nineteen centuries of Christianity contempt for human life is evident among us, in the frequency of homicide, of infanticide; in the appalling rate of infant mortality; in the ruthless conditions of many of our manufactories; in heedless habits of society at large, and of private homes. We boast that we are far from the gladiatorial shows of ancient Rome—and so we are, thank God—but now and

Copyright, 1913, by THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW PUBLISHING COMPANY. All Rights Reserved.

then even we slip back toward the disregard of life of which the Coliseum is a monument; as when lately an aviator, on account of the condition of his machine, hesitated to make the ascent which a crowd had paid to see; and the people, with angry clamor, insisted that the aviator *must* go up, until he yielded to their taunts, and perished. Nevertheless in our better moments, under the influence of Jesus, we repudiate such brutality toward others; and in every sort of business men and women are rising from the weariness of daily toil and sin, and are trying to fill the vacant spaces of their existence with imaginative visions of a better being for each one. The man who, after a hard day's work, takes refuge in a novel, or a bit of music, or a wholesome play at the theater, or who, of a Sunday morning, goes to church hardly knowing why, witnesses to an imperious demand of his own soul. In spite of the vexations and the monotony of our occupations, there is a common feeling that each life, on this revolving planet in the spaces of the stars, is not only wonderful but well worth while, if only we can learn the secret, the purpose of it; if we might make fewer mistakes, and might come to terms with the uncertainty of it all. With this feeling in their hearts some people are gazing all about them, trying to read the signs of the times, peering into the distance, hoping to catch sight of the form of life that will console and satisfy them, and stay. Others are snatching time to look within themselves, wistfully conjecturing that that satisfying form of the better personal life is, after all, within us; hidden away in the chambers of silence; and only waiting, waiting, for our personal attention and a more consistent will.

Thus the growing sense of the value of life arouses increasing disquietude. How can I get at the real thing, and do the right thing, and save my life, before I go hence and am no more seen?

This virus of disquietude has penetrated from West to East. Japan and China have it, and the Balkans nearer home. Wherever the modern industrial system makes way, there is the same unrest that spoke in Broadway two weeks ago on the banner of the Garment Workers: "We strike for a better life." It is getting on the nerves of earnest people everywhere; and as for the politicians, it confuses their calculations. They don't see how to trim their sails. So "without are fightings, within are fears." Yet fear is

a bad atmosphere in which to live. How shall we exorcise our fears? How meet the evidence of impending change, political and social and individual?

Recently in New York we have had the great privilege of lectures on this general subject by the distinguished French philosopher, Professor Henri Bergson, who was invited to tell us what he has come to know of the philosophy of life and liberty. His productions hitherto, his whole view of things, and his coming to our shores at the request of a great university, are typical of the times. Some claim him as an ally of Christianity. Others think that Syndicalism and the International Workers of the World, who troubled us at Lawrence and are now troubling us in New York, with their rampant anarchism and desire to upset everything, careless of what may happen—some find in these a practical application of Bergson's philosophy. He has a marvelous intellect, a fascinating style. He handles the themes of metaphysics with luminous precision, bringing them near to our ordinary lives. With apt illustrations from our daily doings, he throws light on the difficult abstractions which he has been pondering in his heart and brain. His vivid pen makes his ideas sparkle as they pass; so that, when we lay down his books, we take the applications home. We had not thought of life quite so, but so it seems to be.

Professor Bergson's book, *Creative Evolution*, has attracted wide attention throughout Europe and America, especially his conception of free-will and personality, and his insistence that the merely intellectual, mathematical, scientific treatment of matter and mind and the universe has been overdone. It is true that the tone of the scientists had been changing in this respect, and already had become less positive as to the riddle of the universe. The more that Science has sharpened its tools and broadened its scope, the more it has been willing to eschew an intention or ability to grapple with—much less to solve—the ultimate problem of existence. But many scientists for many years were overbold in this direction, and their unwarranted assumptions as to the sufficiency of the scientific method beyond the scientific field had so impressed the average public that Bergson, to clear the way for his philosophy, felt bound to say to scientists, "So far and no farther!" He urges that the methods and the tools of natural science are more limited in their proper application than most scientists of the nine-

teenth century supposed: that the *whole* of the life process eludes them: that the limits of Science are fixed by the limitations of the intellect: that the life process as an entirety transcends and escapes our reason, both in theory and practice, and compels us to make room for Intuition, which gets closer to life itself and to the secret of life.

Notice that in thus restricting the scope of our reasoning power, Bergson takes care, on the other hand, to set bounds to Mysticism; for he emphasizes the importance of clear, reasonable ideas as guides to intuition and as opportunities for its exercise: the clearer our ideas are as postulates of reason, the more fruitful and helpful they are to the intuitive faculty; but it penetrates further than they into the reality of our conscious being. "You cannot make yourself will by your intellectuality: will creates intellectuality," he says. Yet "Intuition is not all guess-work. It is necessary to be impregnated with the subject, if we would find a solution for it." "Our souls shall vibrate continuously in unison with nature." He says again:

"Our eyes, aided by our memory, would cut out in space, and fix in time, inimitable pictures. We would hear singing in the depths of our soul, like music, sometimes gay, more often plaintive, always original, the uninterrupted melody of our interior life. All this is around us, all this is in us, and yet nothing of all this is perceived by us distinctly. Between nature and us—what do I say?—between us and our own consciousness a veil interposes, a thick veil for the common man, a thin veil, almost transparent, for the artist and the poet. What fairy has woven this veil?"*

As he exercises his faculty of intuition, Professor Bergson discovers in himself a stream-like flow of consciousness, in which there are no breaks, but a ceaseless interpenetration of past and present. Duration is the essence of the life process; which is a perpetual accumulation and flux of experiences, and a perpetual creation of new forms and new contents—creative evolution. When life is *lived*—not merely reflected on by the reason—our life is this process of the constant force which we term personality, individuality, coping with like individuals in the world around, and with other elemental forces which somehow are thrown up to us and seem to be impersonal. No individual can foretell the result of this process—the outcome of the interaction

* Bergson's first lecture at Columbia University, February 3, 1913, as reported in the *New York Sun* Tuesday morning, February 4th.

which constitutes life—and there is no use worrying about it. Such is life. The individual can but seize his opportunity to exercise his best choice, and let it go at that, holding himself ready to choose again and act again, from emergency to emergency, practising his creative possibilities. “Act, act in the living present”: exert yourself in detail all the time, and go on, no matter what happens to you—that is life.

And Bergson seems to think—he is enough Stoical for that—he seems to think that his view of individual life, and of the individual's value in the whole of things, will avail to exorcise our fears: that the changes and chances of our lives ought not to disquiet us or render us unhappy, for the simple reason that they are not an accidental feature of life, but belong to the substance of it. They are the waves of the sea. They are not a sign that we are in danger of our life; for what we look upon as danger is part and parcel of the very thing—such is life. Hence is it quite as silly to look forward to a golden age, and fear that these changes and chances may rob us of it, as it is to look back and imagine that the golden age once was? Such as it is, this is the golden age. Every age is the golden age; and our life will always be thus hazardous. We are not dying, or deteriorating, because we are in danger. To live at all is to be in danger, if you choose to call it such. To pass from change to change—to be in a sort of moving picture of dissolving views and consequential acts—such is life, and there is no other. The individual will always be obliged to cope with change: that is his part in the creative evolution, the process of life.

Nevertheless, after describing in this thrilling way the general character of human life, is not Professor Bergson throwing out into the contemporary camp an idea which might leave us worse confounded than before? Has he done much to allay our disquietude—our dread of impending change? For remember, our dislike of utter uncertainty is part of the very thing which is presented to our faculty of intuition. We *do* dislike uncertainty. We cannot pretend that both the fact and our feeling about it are not as genuine as the rest of the problem of our life. We are so made that we suffer when we are on the brink of losing what we love. And the trouble is, that Bergson, after opening up wide vistas for creative evolution, and after insisting on

the abiding value of the individual's creative ability, will not allow that the individual has any particular assurance of an end to accomplish—of a plan to follow. A plan, he claims, would close the future and rob us of our freedom. A plan would tie us, as the carpenter is tied to his architect's design. For my part, I never met a carpenter who felt half so free as when he had in his hands a good architect's design to work out; whereas Bergson maintains that we are only free to try our hand at being, and cannot foresee at all what we are creating, nor what predicament our acts will bring us to. All we can do is to exercise a sort of perpetual presence of mind—an intuition—whereby the will keeps wide awake to the possibilities of the moment, so that there and then the individual realizes himself. And in that momentary act of breaking through the portals of the future, which are always open, the individual becomes the creator that he is; and therewith he ought to be content.

Is not Bergson making a mistake similar to that which he charges against the scientists of the nineteenth century? Is he not making of evolution a sort of superstition? Is he not holding it too strictly to the form in which it applies to the animal kingdom alone, forgetting that man has become decidedly different from a mere animal? Is not Bergson carrying a theory (or, if you please, a law) of biology over to a field where it does not quite apply? Or rather, if you can take that law of biology over with you into the field of ethics and the personal will, must you not admit, to blend with it, a new principle which belongs, and must not be denied to ethics, if ethics is to carry the sanctions and the stimulus of real religion? In other words, are we not here at a point where there is a passage from the comparatively simple to the more complex, somewhat analogous to the transmutation of what had been supposed to be an unalterable element of matter into another and higher element—such as the transmutation by electricity of the element neon into helium which was heralded from London a short time ago by Sir William Ramsay and Professors Collie and Patterson of the English Chemical Society, and which by some scientists is spoken of as the Birth of the Atom? It was the dream of the Alchemists that lead might be transmuted into gold; and the scientists are now inquiring whether this new discovery, if it be substantiated, will not justify the old alchemist's dream. And, to use this as a

physical illustration of a spiritual affair, may we not reverently say that in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—the Second Adam or New Man, as Paul calls Him—we have the capital instance of the transmutation of the lead of ordinary human nature into the gold of the Perfect Man? Did not Paul foreshadow this when he declared to the Ephesians, “You hath Christ quickened”? When the Christian appropriates the new, redeeming, spiritual force which Christ affords to him, have we not a world-wide instance of spiritual transmutation? Notice that even Bergson proposes to us his doctrine, not merely as a philosophy for our abstract contemplation, but for our mental and moral betterment. By implication, he himself is performing an act of creative evolution. Bergson is not content to offer us his philosophy as a mere catalogue of observations—an account of life as he has seen it: he expects that his philosophy shall convey to us a dynamic influence: that it shall carry to those who accept it a positive force which will assist them to happiness and right living. Now when we come to that—to serenity of soul, and the determination to live rightly—is it wise or seemly to ignore the message and the life of Christ?

Therefore, though Professor Bergson is by extraction a Jew, I hope that he will apply his brilliant mind and sympathetic heart directly to the life and influence of Jesus Christ; for Christ pre-eminently laid stress on man's freedom, and none so much as Christ enabled men to be fearless of change, and even of death. Christ, too, certainly no less than Bergson, delivers us from the crush of necessity all round, and makes a quickening appeal to each man's persistent energy. Christ's method and philosophy of life are before us; and, to say the least, they are as worthy of consideration as Bergson's. Why then do gifted men not grapple with the problem of Christ's life as they grapple with the problem of life with Christ left out? With seriousness and passion and power, with determination to see and to explain, with nice selection of terse phrases and careful illustrations, they expose the whole of human life as they see it, but with one historic phase of it omitted. They pass by Jesus Christ, though they are aware that He has been the most striking and potent factor in modern history. The fact is that they are open to everything in the life process except Christ's part in it for two thousand years. They

are more open to the thrill and the sting of their own brief present day than they are to the thrill and the sting of the solemn exhibition of free personality which culminated in Gethsemane and on the Cross, though the impact of Christ's influence has unquestionably lasted in human society ever since. "A great artist sees masses, not edges," is a saying of Ruskin's; and it applies to the progress of religion in the world. It is by observing the great general masses of tendency, as manifested in human soul-life and history, not by attempting to define what surpasses our powers of definition, that we are likeliest to apprehend the significance of the evolution. True, such men as Bergson are ready to admit the stimulus of hardship. Bergson would not blink that for a moment: he has none of the passion for mere comfort which spoils so much of our modern attempts at social service and our philosophies of progress; but, so far as his literary productions go, there is little to show that Bergson has ever grappled with Christ, or recognized the stimulus—the creative evolution—of Gethsemane. With fine enthusiasm Bergson offers us a religion of personal exertion; but he makes no reference to Christ's religion of personal exertion and redemption—the world process, as Christ sees it, of the Heavenly Father, leading, purging, lifting mankind, by their own personal co-operation with their personal God under the stimulus of Jesus. Bergson has indeed advanced already some distance toward the point where Christ must be considered; for, in a letter to a friend which has just been published in Professor Edouard Le Roy's little volume, *Une Philosophie Nouvelle*, Bergson says:

"The considerations set forth in my 'Essay' on the immediate facts of consciousness are intended to bring to light the fact of Liberty: those in *Matter and Memory* touch upon the reality of Spirit: those in *Creative Evolution* present creation as a fact. From all this there clearly emerges the idea of a God, creator and free; the generator at once of matter and of life, whose creative efforts as regards life are continued through the evolution of species and the constitution of human personalities."

But it still remains for Bergson to tell us what he thinks of the unique personality of Jesus, and of His epoch-making influence on human history; and it seems to me that in this last letter of his we have the point where Bergson is likely to find the place of Christ in the whole scheme of Creative Evolution. For, as Illingsworth remarks in his book on

Reason and Revelation (and Bergson, I think, would approve the remark):

"We do not understand things simply by analyzing their structure or composition, but by discerning their place in this universal system, their relation to the purpose of the world. Hence the true realm of reality consists in personal beings, since only such can realize ideal ends, or objects of worth, and it centers in God . . . and the bond of this realm of reality is love, which has 'eternal and supreme worth.'"

Such a conviction as this inevitably leads men who are possessed of the spiritual eye to regard themselves as members of a body, so that they easily apprehend the Christian metaphor of St. Paul in the classic passage of the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

If, then, I take all that Bergson has to say, and carry it along with what Christ says, and with what Christ is, what does Jesus Christ do for me that, so far, Bergson does not do? Christ, like Bergson, presents Himself to my intuition: He is a fact to be reckoned with: His message must be considered. As to the details of my future, Christ is in a way as vague, as indeterminate, as Bergson. Nevertheless to my faculty of intuition (or faith, as He calls it) Christ presents certain principles of action, which, in a general way, if I accept them, will control and guarantee my future; such as the Golden Rule, and the Beatitudes, and the sacrificial life, with assurance of personal immortality because underneath me are the Everlasting Arms, and, for Christ's sake, God forgives. Besides, Christ does more than to present me these principles; He embodies in Himself the type of life which springs from these principles, and He says: "Behold Me. Follow Me. Once thou art awake to My likeness, thou shalt be satisfied with it." If, of my free choice, I adopt His principles, Christ promises that I shall grow into His likeness. Beyond that, Jesus left His disciples unhampered. Considering how clear and beautiful, and definite in outline and tone and feature, He Himself was, as the New Testament portrays him, it is wonderful how He gives the reins to those who bear His name, rich or poor; Jew or Gentile; barbarian, Scythian, bond or free. When they ask Him for more directions, He bids them wait till His Spirit comes to guide. When Peter is inquisitive about John—"Lord, what shall this man do?"—Christ answers, "What is that to thee?" He will not tie men to a hard and fast programme that describes all cases in advance.

In a moment of confidence He even admits that He Himself does not forestall the future. Not only is it not for them to know the times and the seasons, but of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Some of the early Christians did indeed make bold to draw imaginative pictures of the Kingdom of God and the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven; but Jesus is reticent. Eye hath not seen it; ear hath not heard it; neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. In that sense Christ does not cramp us with a plan. Nay more, if we accord to St. John's Gospel the weight that Dr. Sanday (after careful consideration of all adverse criticisms) does accord to it; in which he is supported by Professor H. R. Mackintosh, of Edinburgh, in the volume of Dr. Briggs's *International Theological Library*, recently published under the title "The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ." If we attach such weight to St. John's Gospel, then Christ too uses strange words which indicate that "Duration" (to use Bergson's term) is the essence of His life process: "Before Abraham was I AM. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. I and My Father are One." Whereupon Christ turns round and counsels His disciples: "Take therefore no anxious thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Thus, then, in the kaleidoscope, the panorama, of human history, our own creative will, our intuition (or, as the Bible calls it, our faith) addresses itself to life according to the principles, and under the stimulus, of Jesus Christ. He quickens us. This is life eternal, to know Him: to act and think and desire in each emergency, as nearly as we can, like Christ. Every great religion but the Christian has decayed, as the panorama turned and turned and dissolved away; but the religion of Jesus, wherever and whenever it has been carried out in the lives of men, has been equal to every emergency. The Beatitudes, and the Golden Rule, and the assurance of immortality and forgiveness, and the sacrificial life—these suffice. These equip us for any field: enable us to adjust ourselves to any circumstances. "Such trust have we through Christ toward God." We are content to be alive: to achieve the Christ-like character. As to what that character may bring me to in unforeseen contingencies

—what it may exact of me—what I shall be like, and my wife like, and my children and friends like, in the world to come, or even a year hence—I have seen Jesus. And, wonderful to tell, the Christian's own personal experience, in many ways and diverse manners—as little by little, better and better, we act as Christ acted—enables us to understand what Paul meant when he said, "Christ in you the hope of glory." This is not merely an anticipation: it is a present act—creative evolution.

"Such trust have we through Christ to Godward." So Paul spoke nineteen hundred years ago, at the outset of the era when the birth of Jesus was renewing the energies of a discouraged world. Has anything happened since to undermine such confidence? "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Pessimists are asking whether, after all, there is such a thing as human progress; whether the pendulum is not forever swinging back and forth; whether the last development, democracy, can keep going much longer; whether the Syndicalists and the International Workers of the World are not sounding the knell of democracy, ushering in anarchy once more. But the fact is, democracy is proving that we cannot get on in it without the character of Jesus Christ. So there is a great wave of desire to be thorough with the principles of Christ—really to enact them over against our political and industrial and spiritual unrest. Hard-headed, empty-handed toilers cheer when Christ is mentioned, and take Him for their Friend; though at the same time they are suspicious of professing Christians. Why? Because more and more association has come to be the aim and the condition of civilization: it is the note of democracy; and no other principles than Christ's can cope with the problems of association and enable men to dwell together in unity; and the multitude can see that in the new problems of our time Christians generally are not living up to the principles of Christ, so as to be able to associate with all sorts and conditions of men. We Christians go at our tasks of business and politics and society blindly, beating the air, using up energy in makeshift experiments, when yonder is Jesus with His Golden Rule, and His Beatitudes, and His sacrificial life, all ready for us to apply. Really applied, they have never failed. This is eternal life.

Am I generalizing? For God's sake, then, let us go into particulars. There is nothing else in life for you and me

but personal conduct in particulars. If you and I and all our Christian neighbors would act like Christ in particulars on the spur of the moment—and there is no other spur—in our homes, in our business, in our recreations, whatever betide us, or our town, or our whole land, we should be laying hold on eternal life. Go into particulars. Put away lying. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth. Let all bitterness and wrath and evil speaking and malice be put away from us; and be we kind one to another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us. Love God as Christ reveals Him with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. There is no emergency which that life will not fit. It has this pragmatic value. And the Peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ. We all, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image. Seeing we have this ministry, we faint not, for we are entering into the life process which Christ disclosed and secured to mankind.

GEORGE WILLIAM DOUGLAS.